

Comment on the proposed conservation of *Pyralis* (currently *Cydia* or *Laspeyresia*) *nigricana* Fabricius, 1794 (Insecta, Lepidoptera)

(Case 2468; see BZN 43: 93–95)

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1. We oppose Seymour's proposed suppression of the specific name *rusticella* Clerck, 1759, on three counts. More importantly, we use this case to highlight the practice, that seems to be becoming routine in Lepidoptera systematics, of requesting the suppression of any senior synonym that comes to light. We believe that acceptances of such requests devalue nomenclature, encourage poor scholarship and ultimately weaken the authority of the Code and of the Commission.

2. It is now very late to suppress *rusticella*. Four years have elapsed since our publication of the junior synonymy of *nigricana* Fabricius, 1794 (Robinson & Nielsen, 1983, p. 229). In that period the name *rusticella* has been introduced into revisions of two national checklists — Danish (Schnack, 1985, pp. 33 and 75) and British (1984; see *Antenna*, 8: 162) — and was accepted by Horak (1984, p. 11).

3. Although, as Seymour states (BZN 43: 93), Clerck gave no written description or account of *Phalaena rusticella*, his figure is far less ambiguous, in our opinion, than Fabricius' brief and typically eighteenth-century description of *Pyralis nigricana*. Furthermore, although no type material of *nigricana* seems to have survived, there is an extant original specimen of *rusticella* which we have designated as lectotype (Robinson & Nielsen, 1983, p. 229). We therefore argue that *rusticella* is an inherently better-based name than *nigricana* and that our action in synonymising the latter is in the interests of long-term nomenclatural stability.

4. We find the principle involved in the proposal for suppression of *rusticella* most disturbing. This case, like many others referred to the Commission, has come about because of inadequate research by earlier workers. Failure to establish the identities of the taxa described by early authors is commonplace in many groups, and is an inherent source of nomenclatural instability. We (see Karsholt & Nielsen, 1983) have attempted to improve, and encouraged others to improve, the nomenclatural foundations of Lepidoptera systematics by re-examining the publications and surviving collections of the earliest authors (e.g. of C. P. Thunberg (1743–1828)). We consider that the criteria for the use of plenary powers for the suppression of senior synonyms (Article 79c) are inappropriate in the context of the present state of the art of Lepidoptera nomenclature and systematics. In this group the taxa described by many of the earlier authors have not yet been reviewed, and nomenclature within the group will remain in a state of flux until this task has been completed.

5. Suppression of senior synonyms under these circumstances gives, we believe, an erroneous message to the zoological community — that its representatives (the Commission) give their tacit approval to the regular overturning of the Principle of Priority and, in effect, a licence to ignore 'difficult' authors and their collections. Our unease is

clearly shared by others (e.g. Campbell & Phillips (BZN 43: 10–12). We endorse and support the plea by Olson, Rea & Brodtkorb (BZN 43: 13) that sound nomenclatural rules should not give way to poor scholarship. The latter is only too easily encouraged. We go further, believing that it should not be the function of the Commission to regularly subvert its own rules. Applications for suppression of little-used or unused senior synonyms, and acceptances of those applications, have become almost routine for Lepidoptera at least (e.g. Opinions 1361 and 1362 (BZN 42: 349, 351)). This places a short-term burden of time and money on the zoological community in having to support the quasi-legal procedures involved in suppression. It places a further, long-term burden on the community in the repetitive citation of the suppressed senior name (and chapter and verse of its suppression).

6. We concede that the scientific names of a small number of animals (some domestic animals, laboratory stock animals and 'public-consciousness' animals), names with thousands of usages a year, should be safeguarded, particularly if the names are used by non-biologists. We do not admit *Cydia nigricana*, with apparently (BZN 43: 94) fewer than 10 citations per year, into this category, despite compliance with Article 79c. The more widespread and widely-cited pest *Plutella maculipennis* Curtis, 1832 (Lepidoptera: YPOMEUTIDAE) was synonymised twenty years ago. An application to the Commission supporting the continued usage of *maculipennis* (BZN 27: 60) was unsuccessful (Opinion 1002: BZN 30: 86), and the moth is now known throughout the world as *Plutella xylostella* (Linnaeus, 1758). This change occurred without dreadful consequence. It was a change, we think, in favour of stability.

We ask the Commission to reject the application for suppression of the specific name *rusticella*.

(2) Reply by P. R. Seymour

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1. The above objection by Robinson and Nielsen to the proposed conservation of *nigricana* is unexpected, being at variance with their original (1983, p. 229) remarks: '... It may be considered that the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature should be asked to suppress the name *rusticella*. *Cydia nigricana* is an economically important species with a wide literature, and the case for the conservation of the name *nigricana* is a strong one.' I have already quoted this in my application (BZN 43: 93). Despite this, Robinson & Nielsen did not propose the suppression of *rusticella* 'as we recall the case of *Plutella xylostella* (L.), the Diamond-Backed Moth, the Linnean name for which was adopted only recently and with little opposition or confusion' (Opinion 1002).

2. The case for the conservation of *nigricana* is soundly based on the Code Articles 23b and 79c, which deal with the problem of unused senior synonyms, and I reiterate my original application.

3. The name *nigricana* has been in use since 1794, and from 1901 has been consistently applied as the valid specific name for the Pea Moth. As a common, widely distributed pest, *C. nigricana* is cited extensively in the literature, and throughout the Palaearctic and parts of the Nearctic regions its caterpillar is known to most people

who have shelled peas. The familiar name *nigricana* prevails in the current literature (in my application I mentioned (BZN 43: 94) over 97 references in the period 1973–1983, and that list was far from exhaustive). The species is described as *Cydia nigricana* in the keywork by Carter (1984, p. 156) and in the 1983 *Check List of the Lepidoptera North of Mexico*. The only national checklist in which *nigricana* has been replaced by *rusticella* is the Danish one (Schnack, 1985) of which Dr Nielsen was a co-author and which explicitly adopted priority as an invariable policy (see p. 22). The anonymous British reference (1984, *Antenna*, 8: 162) placing *nigricana* as a junior synonym of *rusticella* has not been followed in the recent *Indexed List of British Butterflies and Moths* (Bradley & Fletcher, 1986, p. 27) nor has it been adopted in the internationally read *Review of Applied Entomology*. The name *nigricana* has been used in combination with *Cydia* or *Laspeyresia* for more than 100 years, and is well known in both combinations. The problem of whether to adopt *Cydia* Hübner, [1825] or *Laspeyresia* Hübner, [1825] as the valid generic name for the genus containing *nigricana* has been submitted to the Commission by Kuznetsov & Kerzhner (Case 2421; BZN 41: 110–113; 42: 8–10; 43: 8–9). A ruling by the Commission that will stabilise the usage of the generic name is awaited, but the outcome does not affect the present case.

4. The case of *nigricana* versus *rusticella* is a straightforward one, not involving other specific names, and therefore is not directly comparable with that of the Diamond-back Moth, *Plutella xylostella* (Linnaeus).

5. Robinson & Nielsen are continuing the endless argument of stability versus priority. The Principle of Priority is an ideal striven for by taxonomists but, as emphasized by the Code (Article 23b), it is occasionally necessary to depart from it for the sake of stability, and the present case is an appropriate one. The basis of the name *rusticella* is not at issue following the review of Clerck's collection of microlepidoptera and the subsequent designation of a lectotype by Robinson & Nielsen. What is at issue is simply the introduction of the unused senior synonym *rusticella* to replace *nigricana*, which has for nearly 200 years been indisputably established throughout the world as the scientific name for this important species.

6. It may be pertinent to conclude with the broader issue raised in Robinson & Nielsen's first paragraph, where they consider it important to use the present case to highlight the practice of suppressing the name of any rediscovered senior synonym. According to them this practice is becoming routine in Lepidoptera systematics. Their assertion is dubious. Although the instinctive reaction to a change — when it concerns a much cherished name — is to seek the retention of the familiar name, relatively few requests for suppression actually materialise. This may partly be due to the fact that, contrary to their views, such requests require good scholarship.

7. I contend that stability is best safeguarded by the conservation of *nigricana* Fabricius, 1794 and the suppression of *rusticella* Clerck, 1759, and I ask the Commission to adopt my original proposals. In this I am supported by the colleagues mentioned previously (see BZN 43: 94).

References

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Comment on the suggested introduction into the Code of the term ‘nomenclaturally valid’

(Case 2513; see BZN **43**: 308–309; **44**: 131)

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The proposal that the term ‘nomenclaturally valid’ be introduced into the Code clarifies a distinction that has long been needed between names acceptable in purely nomenclatural terms (available names) and names that can be taxonomically valid, being neither junior homonyms nor junior (objective) synonyms.

Indeed, that distinction, with a different terminology, was suggested by me as early as 1947 and expanded in 1962, although not in channels that would evoke action by the Commission. It is the distinction, not its terminology, that is important. Since the Code’s definition of ‘availability’ is now firmly entrenched, the term ‘nomenclaturally valid’ should unquestionably be adopted in the proposed contexts.

References

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